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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

JANUARY

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**THE BLONDE
FROM SPACE**

**THE SEVEN EYES
OF CAPT. DARK**



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A MASTERPIECE OF FUTURE HISTORY

NO MORE SEA

By A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

Meyer was Dictator, and Farson was King of the Rockets, and Sandra wanted a baby. Together they brought a dead world — and its dead Beings — to life. Together they suffered for their daring.

THAT was the year of the revolution, the year that the Council was overthrown, the year that the New Earth Party seized control. That was the year that, in desperation, the Colonists turned to desperate remedies. That was the year that Meyer rode high in the saddle, the year that Sandra Marin, more mystic than scientist, saw her theories put to the test, the year that Farson, farmer turned astronaut, woke the big ships from their centuries' long sleep in their closed orbit about the planet and drove out to the uncharted wilderness of the Belt.

It is hard for us, looking back, fully to appreciate the problems of our fathers. We have our problems, too, but they are of an altogether different nature. We are having to consider stringent measures to deal with an

ever increasing population with a consequent shortage of both living space and food supplies. We are not concerned, as were Meyer and Marin and Farson, with a mounting death rate and ever-decreasing birth rate, with what seemed to the orthodox scientists of that day to be the senility of the race.

We have our problems, but there is not yet the same urgency. The big ships hang in their orbits and the shuttle rockets are maintained in a state of readiness, but it is unlikely that we shall have to use them in our lifetimes. Should we do so, it is to be hoped that we shall not, as did Farson, reap a totally unforeseen harvest from the seeds that we sow. We were lucky that time. We may not be so lucky again.

Surprisingly little material

survives to give a picture of the days before the revolution. There are a few fragments of film, some age-yellowed newspapers, a file containing reports of the meetings, over a period of one Martian year, of the Council of Marsmen. It must be appreciated, of course, that there were more important things to save than reels of film and tape, scraps of paper.

Regarding the revolution itself, and what came after, we are more fortunate. Even with conditions as rigorous as they were at the time of the Return some of our fathers found opportunity to write. There is, too, the Log Book of *Star of Hope*, Farson's flagship. There are photographs of Meyer and Sandra Marin and Roy Farson, and recordings of some of the speeches made by Meyer, and most of the material set down by Farson in his private journal. Most, not all. Students of history will recall that one of the shuttles crashed on landing at the time of the Return and that much of its cargo of written records was destroyed by fire.

The photographs are interesting. There is one showing the three of them together. Farson is a typical Marsman, standing at least six and a half feet in height, all bone and sinew. He has faded blue eyes and a thatch of straw-colored hair. His features are so angular as to be just short of ugliness. Marin is a typical Marswoman, almost as

tall as Farson, long-limbed and slender. Her sullen expression matches the sullen smouldering of her almost red hair. Meyer, who is standing between them, is a little man, fat, with smudgy black eyes and lank black hair. He looks as though he has missed shaving for two days. He looks insignificant. And yet, at the same time, he dominates the picture.

The first volume of Farson's journal survives. In it he writes: There is great ill feeling in the Colony over the new Bill—the act making compulsory the rotation of wives and husbands. The absurdity of it all is that it merely tries to enforce what we have all been doing over the last few years; Sandra is my fourth wife and I am her fifth husband. We have decided that even though our union has been barren, as have been all the previous ones, we do not want to change. Meyer was round to dinner tonight. After the usual unsatisfying meal of processed yeast—it is a great pity that even the rabbits are affected by this curse!—we talked, mainly about the Bill. Sandra told Carl about her theory. He was rather impressed. He said that the main trouble is that we have tried to adapt Man to live on Mars and that we should have tried to adapt Mars to suit Man.

But where is all the water to come from?

A few days later there is another entry: The Council is trying to enforce the new law. Bill

Blackett and Susan Grant have already received prison sentences for refusing to allow themselves to be divorced. Sandra and I have talked things over and decided to stick it out—after all, they can't put over two-thirds of the population in prison.

Then, a week later: Carl was round to dinner tonight. He tells us that he is forming a party—the New Earth Party. He says that I should take more seriously what has always been a hobby of mine—the study of astronautics. He says that some of the junior engineers are with him and have already worked out ways and means of preparing the shuttle rockets for use. He says that it will be possible for the power plants to run on alcohol and that the reaction units can be refitted to the big ships. I asked him what all this had to do with his—and Sandra's—New Earth ideas. He replied that we had to have a sea, and that the early, uncompleted surveys of the Asteroid Belt had indicated that there were several sizeable planetoids that were practically nothing more than masses of ice. It would be possible, he assured me, for such ice masses to be dragged from their orbits and towed to that of Mars, where they would be allowed to fall to the old sea beds. The idea seems fantastic—but the virtual destruction of Earth and the migration of a few shiploads of survivors would have seemed fantastic to a man of an earlier generation.

There is a later entry in Farson's diary covering the first public meeting of the New Earth Party. It is admirably concise and, even, objective—but it leaves out too much. He knew both Meyer and Sandra Marin and knew what they stood for; there was no need for him to set down his impressions of them and their ideas in what was, so far as he knew, a private journal. Luckily, the next day's issue of *The Martian Chronicle* carries a full account of proceedings.

BACK TO THE SEA, it is headed. *MARS TO BE A NEW EARTH?*

Many of us, it begins, disapprove most strongly of the new law. It makes compulsory what, until now, has always been a matter of choice. The supporters of the Council maintain that the survival of the race must be ensured by whatever means are available, but have yet to prove that their new measure will be any more effective than have been the diets and injections of the past.

The new law has its enemies, and we make no secret of the fact that we wish them well. We make no secret of the fact that the warmest of our good wishes go to Mr. Carl Meyer and his new party—his New Earth Party. Not only does Mr. Meyer oppose this latest example of Council tyranny but he puts forward counter proposals that may well prove effective in rescuing our race from oblivion.

It was in a skeptical mood that

I went last night to the Guildhall, where the first meeting of the New Earth Party had been advertised as taking place. I have been to so many meetings. I have listened to so many speakers claiming that they had the right answers, the only right answers, to all our problems. There was Kravinsky, whom some of you will remember, who claimed that Man could become fertile on Mars only by becoming a real Martian, by living outside the Domes without clothing or breathing helmet. He and his wife tried it. I was there, at the airlock, the next morning when their stiff-frozen corpses were brought in. There have been the radiation cranks and the diet cranks and the rhythm cranks. To give all of them their due, they have all met with as much success as have the Council scientists.

And as little.

The meeting was not as crowded last night as I thought it would be. I realize now why this should have been so. Had it been billed as a protest meeting all of Marsopolis would have been there. As it was being held to propose constructive measures it had little appeal—the public, after all, is as tired of cranks as it is of the Council, supposing that any real difference between the two exists.

Music was playing as I entered the Guildhall. It was a piece unfamiliar to me—but I have always preferred our own music,

composed on Mars, to the music of Earth. It was unfamiliar, I had never heard it before—and yet it was familiar. There was something about it—a sense of rhythm, of fluid motion. There was something about it that pulled at the blood rather than at the brain.

"*La Mer*," said a man beside me.

"*La Mer*?" I asked.

"Yes. *La Mer*. The Sea. I wonder where Meyer dug that recording up. I thought that the Institute of Art and Culture had the only one on the planet."

There were three people on the platform. There was a little man—Meyer. He has about him that forceful air possessed by certain other little men of history. There was something about him—the pallor, the sullen expression, the black hair—of that Napoleon who was once Emperor of France. There was something about him of Commodore Tranter who, as we all know, organized the evacuation of the handful of survivors from a doomed Earth. He was wearing, of course, the uniform of his Guild, the sober black and white of the Clerks.

There was a man of average height, dressed in the green livery of the Farmers. Somehow, he didn't look like a Farmer—although for me to say so is to doubt the efficacy of the Aptitude Tests, and to doubt anything these days that comes under the aegis of the Council is tantamount to treason.

There was a woman in the green and scarlet of the Bio-Chemists—and the scarlet clashed badly with her auburn hair. That was Sandra Marin, the wife of Roy Farson, the man in Farmers' green. Once again, I venture to say, the Aptitude Tests went wrong. Sandra Marin should have been a poet, not a scientist. Sandra Marin *feels* rather than reasons.

Sandra Marin may well be right.

The music stopped and Meyer got to his feet. He spoke well, with a good choice of words and a carrying voice, a big voice, as the voices of little men so often are. His first words were such as to shock the audience—as, indeed, they were intended to do.

"Fellow Earthmen," he said, "and Earthwomen . . ." He waited for fully half a minute. "According to the Council we're Martians. Earth is just a little light in the sky, seen before sunrise or after sunset. Earth is something of a dirty word, too. Earth is the planet that got its soil and atmosphere poisoned by radiation and from which the favored few who were our ancestors contrived to flee in time. We've finished with Earth. We never want to see it again, save as a morning or an evening star . . .

"But is Earth finished with us?"

He paused again.

"I'm not going to launch any diatribe against the Council—

yet. They're doing their best—and a poor, fumbling best it is. Rightly, they put the well being of the race before the well being of the individual. I've no quarrel with that. What I object to is this—the new law *will have no effect whatsoever*, the new law merely makes compulsory what everybody has been doing, in and out of wedlock, ever since the initial panic about the steadily falling birth rate set in.

"We, of the New Earth Party, think that we have the answer. We may be wrong. Putting our theory to the test will be expensive. But I say this—When the continued existence of our race is at stake, *then damn the expense!*" He waited for the applause to subside—not that there was much of it. He said, "Miss Sandra Marin will now address you."

Sandra Marin got to her feet. She is a striking woman, with a good platform presence—this in spite of an obvious nervousness. She said, in a clear contralto, "Earthmen, Earthwomen—we must never forget that that is what we really are. That has been where the Council has gone wrong, in trying to adapt Man to Mars instead of Mars to Man.

"Most of you are familiar with the story of the evolution of life on Earth." (Here she was flattering her audience—I, for one, have only the haziest ideas on the subject.) "Life began, as you know, in the sea. The plants were the first to climb from the waters to the land and, over the millen-

nia, they prepared the way for animal life. By photo-synthesis the carbon dioxide was extracted from the atmosphere and free oxygen released. Then, at last, the first amphibians crawled ashore. Gradually they evolved, until they were capable of spending their entire life cycle out of the water.

"But . . .

"They brought the sea with them.

"The blood of all land animals duplicates the salinity of that primordial sea. Spermatozoa are free swimming organisms—as they were when fertilization was a submarine rite. The fertility of a woman was, when we lived on Earth, a tidal cycle. Why this should have been I cannot say—but it was so.

"Now we are on a world with no seas, no tides.

"Give us the sea—and we will again be mothers."

She sat down. Once more there was very little applause, but I could tell that the audience had been impressed. She had given them something to think about. After all, her theory was no more crackpot than many that had been given a sympathetic hearing by the Council. It was some little time before one of the audience got to his feet and shouted, "We'd give you a sea—if we knew how!"

The Farmer, Farson, got slowly to his feet.

"I can give you a sea," he said.

The man in front of me shout-

ed something coarse. Farson flushed.

"I can give you a sea," he repeated. "There's water out there, millions of tons of it. There was a planet out there, once, between Mars and Jupiter. We don't know what happened to it—perhaps we never shall. We know that it broke up. Its seas are there, drifting around forever, great globes of ice, among the debris of a world. To go out to fetch them in would not be an impossible feat of astronautics. It can be accomplished.

"We have the ships. We have the ships in which our ancestors came to Mars after the Final War. They're up there in our sky, requiring only the refitting of their atomic power plants, the re-establishment of their yeast vats and algae tanks, to make them spaceworthy. The shuttle rockets are here on the surface. I've inspected them. As little as two weeks' work should make them ready for use.

"We have already gone into the question of the atomic power units. As you all know, they were ferried down from the ships in the shuttle rockets and were used for the pumps and compressors, the lighting plants. But we can manage without them now. There are ample supplies of industrial alcohol, and the work that is now done by steam turbines can be done just as well by gas turbines. The gas turbines are already in existence. They were built at a time when the Council was considering discon-

tinuing the use of atomic power altogether . . ."

"What about crews?" shouted somebody.

"We have the books," Farson replied. "We have records. After all, handling a spaceship is only a matter of ballistics . . ."

"And how are you going to find these ice planetoids?" demanded somebody else.

Farson did not reply himself, but nodded to a man in the audience, who got slowly to his feet. He was an old man, and was wearing the silver tunic of the Dowsters' Guild.

He said, "I am a water diviner, and I am speaking on behalf of my professional brethren. Should the expedition to the Asteroid Belt be sent out, we shall be glad to cooperate in every way."

It was, I think, the Dowster who swayed the sympathy of the meeting to Meyer's New Earth Party. I don't profess to know what it was like in the old days on Earth, but Diviners, on this planet, are regarded with great respect . . .

So the report goes on. It is obvious that *The Martian Chronicle* lent its backing to Meyer at a very early stage. Subsequent issues contain articles by Meyer, Sandra Marin and Roy Farson. Subsequent issues have editorials highly favorable to the New Earth Party and attacking the Council for its refusal to consider seriously the proposal to bring seas to Mars.

Unfortunately, there is a gap

in Farson's journal at this period. The book may have been destroyed, although it seems more probable that he was too busy to write. It is certain that the Party membership was increasing rapidly and that Farson was playing a major part in its organization. It is certain, too, that he was making a thorough study of astronautics against the day when skilled spacemen would once again be required for the job ahead.

The actual cause of the rebellion is rather obscure. We know that the Council, yielding to public pressure, held a referendum on the New Earth Party's proposals. We know that the New Earth Party was defeated by a comfortable majority. The voting may, quite possibly, have been unrigged. Many of the Marsmen and Marswomen must have dreaded a failure of the compressors with the change-over from atomic to chemical power, must have dreaded the cold, dark nights in the event of the new source of electricity proving inadequate. Certain it is that the Council made the most of this quite possible hazard in its propaganda.

In any case, the Council was out to smash the New Earth Party. Roy Farson and Sandra Marin were lawbreakers, were still man and wife in spite of the Rotation of Partners Act. They had announced in public their intention of breaking the law. They were arrested one night, only a few hours after the an-

nouncement of the result of the Referendum.

Popular legend has it that Meyer led the attack on the prison. Popular legend is probably wrong. It seems certain that what Meyer planned that night was far more than a mere jailbreak—just as the storming of the Bastille was more than a mere jailbreak. The liberation of Farson and Marin, along with other prisoners, was a popular cause, and the New Earth Party made the most of it. But the plans for the uprising must have been laid weeks previously. There was, for example, the question of arms. As far as the Council knew, all weapons were in the hands of the Police—but Meyer's bright young Engineers (oddly enough, there were few Chemists among the original Party membership) had contrived to manufacture, in strict secrecy, large numbers of powerful, steel spring arbalests, a few hundred effective compressed air weapons and even, although these were not used until the later fighting, ingenious and deadly steam cannon.

Meyer, then, may have led the attack on the Central Jail, but it is more likely that he sat in some convenient headquarters, receiving there the reports of his various lieutenants. The assault on the prison was only one of the night's activities. There was the seizure of the Telephone Exchange. There was the attack on the Police Barracks. There was

the successful attempt to take over the Main Switchboard, and the unsuccessful one to gain control of the Compressor Room.

A few accounts of the fighting survive.

It was, it seems, a night of wild confusion. The most successful of Meyer's tactics was the switching off and on of the lights in various sections of the city at apparent random intervals. Apparently random—but it was done to pattern, and each of his officers carried with him a timetable and synchronized his actions with the irregular periods of light and darkness. There were, of course, battery-powered emergency lights—but the airguns and the arbalests made short work of them.

There was, inevitably, bloodshed. Some of the prison guards—those who were Party sympathizers—remained passive, others fought back viciously. Thanks to the stubborn attitude of the elderly woman in charge of the Telephone Exchange, and owing to the fact that her girls were more afraid of her than of the rebels' guns, almost the entire night staff was shot down in cold blood. The duty technicians at the main switchboard were, however, members of the Party, so there was no trouble there. Over half the engineers in the Compressor Room were Party members, too—but there was always a strong police guard over this vital organ of the city and, by a piece of unforeseeable bad luck, the Inspector in charge was

warned of trouble and was able to take prompt steps to circumvent it.

Even so, when morning came Meyer found himself almost in full control of the city.

Almost.

The Compressor Room still held out, as did the Police Barracks. The police in the Barracks were of little importance—they were outnumbered and surrounded, and their water supply had been cut off. Their weapons were no more effective for street fighting than were those being used by the Party. The tear-gas bombs upon which they had relied so heavily were almost useless—when every citizen possesses his own respirator, and regards it as normal an adjunct to everyday life as we regard an umbrella, gas has limited value.

The Compressor Room was of far greater importance.

It was the lungs of the city.

As I have already stated, every citizen possessed his own respirator, the tanks of which, fully charged, would supply oxygen for twelve hours provided that no violent physical exertion was made during that period. We can be sure that Meyer saw to it that all tanks were kept fully charged during the period of emergency. Meanwhile, he had been in touch, by telephone, with Inspector Wayne.

Van Huyten, in his *The Last Days on Mars*, writes as follows:

We were all set to take over the compressors at 2400 hours.

It was the usual thing to have tea made to coincide with the change of shift, at midnight, and it was the usual thing for the police officers to have their share of tea and sandwiches. Collis had the knock-out drops all ready to slip into the policemen's cups. Regnold and Bluttner, of the 1800 to 2400 shift, were to be put out of action, too—although they weren't Council sympathizers they were not in favor of the New Earth Party's plans. Ronald, Pettersham, Lorenzini and Dufay, of the next shift, were all Party men.

It was Clavering's cat that ruined things. This Clavering was a new recruit to the Police, and this was the first night that he had been on duty in the Compressor Room. He had brought his cat with him and, so scarce were pets on Mars, we all made much of the brute. It was a playful beast and enjoyed being the center of attention. Thanks to its antics Collis, officiating at pressure boiler, was able to dope the policemen's tea without any trouble at all.

"Felix likes tea," said Clavering.

Felix made a sound that sounded like "yes." Clavering took a cup from the tray, slopped some of its contents into the saucer. He put the saucer down on the floor. Felix sniffed it, touched the surface of the fluid with the tip of his pink tongue. It was still too hot.

Collis did his best. He contrived, with apparent clumsiness,

to tread on the saucer, breaking it and spilling the tea. He apologized to Clavering. He filled another saucer with tea from his own cup—only to discover that the policeman had found another saucer and had, himself, provided his pet with a replacement for the spilled drink.

Once again Collis was clumsy.

All might have been well, save for the fact that Felix was becoming impatient. The floor of the Compressor Room was clean, although not as level as it should have been. There were a few shallow depressions, in one of which the spilled tea had collected. Felix started to lap up the puddle of rapidly cooling tea then, with a peculiar snort, passed out.

Wayne and his men had the guns. Our own air pistols were stowed in one of the lockers under a pile of cleaning rags. There was shooting. Collis was killed, Lorenzini was badly wounded. (He died during the night.) When the shooting was over Regnold, Bluttner, Ronald, Pettersham, Dufay and myself had been handcuffed to stanchions. Regnold and Bluttner were later released, and went about their routine duties under Police supervision. Wayne did what he could for Lorenzini and tried to call a doctor. By this time, of course, the Telephone Exchange was in Party hands and communications were yet to be restored. By this time, too, the Compressor Room was in a state of siege. There were two attempts, I

think, to blow down the doors, but in each case those who tried to place the bombs were shot before they could do so. We heard the explosions as the bombs went off.

It was towards morning that Wayne had me unshackled from the stanchion. I thought of attacking him, of trying to grab his pistol, but I didn't get any further than thinking about it. My arms were paralyzed with an excruciatingly painful cramp.

"Mr. Van Huyten," he said, reasonably enough, "you seem to have been in the know regarding what was supposed to be happening tonight. What has been happening?"

"Suppose you ask poor Lorenzini," I said bitterly.

We both looked at the two bodies, over which one of the policemen had thrown a sheet.

"Or Collis," I went on.

"I can't ask them," he said. "I'm asking you."

"And I'm telling you," I told him, "that you'd better surrender to the Party forces. We hold all the city now, save for this one part of it."

"Save for this one vital part," he amended. "In any case, I shall never surrender unless I am ordered to do so by the Council."

"The Council," I told him, "is sitting safe and snug at Port Obolensky. They're worried, perhaps, about their own skins. They aren't worried about yours."

Just then the telephone bell

rang. Telling two of his men to keep me covered, Wayne went to the instrument.

"Inspector Wayne here," he said crisply. "Police officer in charge of the Compressor Room. Who's that? Central Committee Headquarters? Never heard of you." There was a long pause. I could hear the faint voice of the man at the other end of the line. I recognized it as Meyer's. "No," said Wayne suddenly. "No. I shall not surrender . . . Yes, you heard me. First of all, I have bombs planted where they'll do the most damage." (That was a lie.) "In the event of any assault on the Compressor Room being successful, those bombs will explode. Secondly, I'm stopping the pumps at 0800 hours. That will give you twelve hours to think things over . . . Yes, I think you'd better get in touch with the Council to try to make terms. The chances are that they'll hang only the ringleaders."

He hung up, returned to where I was sitting. His ruddy face was pale, his broad frame was sagging.

He said, "I'll do it, Van Huyten. I'll do it—make no mistake about that."

"But the compressors have *never* been shut down," I said desperately. "All the years that the city has stood, all the centuries, the compressors have kept running . . ."

"Then they could do with a rest," he said.

After that, save for intervals

during which he was called to the firing slots to supervise defense against new attacks by the Party militia, he tried to grill me on Party aims and policies. He even allowed himself to become involved in an argument.

"I'm a Police officer," he told me, "and I'm pledged to uphold and defend the present regime. But we'll ignore that side of it. We will concentrate on the fact that, on the whole, the Council has ruled wisely and well. Without a strong Council at the head of affairs Man would have become extinct years ago. The Council's scientists are working night and day upon the problem of sterility . . ."

"I can remember when I was a kid," I told him. "I can remember when we still had occasional steaks and roasts of beef. I can remember when pork and rabbit weren't the luxuries they are today. I can remember—" I looked at Felix, who had recovered and was lazily washing his glossy black coat—"when at least one family in every six had a cat and other pets."

"Sentimentality," he sneered. "It's you sentimentalists who have always, throughout history, done the most damage. And now we have all this sentimentality about the sea. Have any of you people worked out just what a huge drain this hare-brained expedition to the Asteroids is going to be on the Colony's resources?"

"We have," I told him, "and we consider the cost worthwhile."

"It will make no difference

whatsoever to the birth rate," he said.

"Then what are we supposed to do? Sit around until the Last Man finds the answer to the problem, and finds that the Last Woman has died of old age while he's been working on it?"

He looked at his watch.

"All right!" he snapped. "It's time. Respirators on. Put them on the prisoners, too!"

Regnold and Bluttner, not without reluctance, started to shut down. One by one the big pumps slowed to a stop. The throbbing whine that had been part of our lives for all our lives faltered and died. It was very quiet, frighteningly so.

Still, I reflected, the situation wasn't entirely hopeless. It would take an appreciable time for the air of the city to become really foul, and I knew that Meyer would think of bringing the emergency fans and the chemical purifiers into use. He would have considerably more time to think up a plan of campaign than the bare twelve hours allowed him by the capacity of the respirators' air tanks.

Then Bluttner—the damned traitor!—spoke up.

"This won't do, Inspector," he said. "This won't do at all."

"Why not?" demanded Wayne.

"Because there are emergency circulating fans and the chemical purifiers. To bring those fools outside to their senses we shall have to restart the exhaust pumps."

I watched his face as he spoke.

Bluttner was determined to be on the winning side—and he had made up his mind as to which side that would be. In his own mind Bluttner was already Chief Compressor Engineer.

"All right," said Wayne. "Start them."

It was Clavering, the young recruit, who tried to stop Bluttner.

"You can't!" he shouted. "You can't! There's no respirator for Felix!"

"There are more things at stake than the life of a cat," said Wayne roughly. "Hold him, Tranter and Gibbs, and let Mr. Bluttner get on with the job!"

Clavering stood silently, his face working. We heard the thin, high note of the rotors building up, we heard it becoming even thinner and higher. I couldn't see the gauges from where I was sitting but I could feel the change in pressure. My eardrums clicked painfully and I had to swallow to bring my hearing back to normal. I looked in fascinated horror at the cat. It stood on its hind legs, lashing out with its taloned forepaws at an invisible antagonist. There was a white froth around its mouth. It was yelling—but all that we could hear was a pitiful squeaking sound. It fell down then, and lay twitching on the floor. Its chest was still heaving convulsively when the rest of it was still.

"You bloody murderer!" said Clavering, looking down at the

body of his pet. He must have shouted it, but the words were no louder than a whisper.

"Grow up, Clavering," said the Inspector tiredly.

We realized that the telephone bell was ringing, had been ringing for some time. Wayne went to the instrument.

"Yes," I heard faintly. "Inspector Wayne here. Have you decided to surrender?" There was a long pause. I saw incredulity on the Inspector's face. It was replaced by horror as he listened to the accuser.

One of the men on guard at the door came running into the main engine room.

"Inspector!" he was shouting, "the Barracks must have fallen! They've got our women out there, and your son! They're threatening to pull their respirators off them!"

"I know," said Wayne in a dull voice. "I know." He picked up the handset again. "Do what you like—but *I'm* not surrendering! And remember this—you'll pay for every murder!"

"You'll pay, you swine!" said Clavering quietly.

In the excitement his fellow policemen had let go of him. Unnoticed, he had pulled his pistol. Now he used it. Even in the thin, Mars-normal atmosphere the reports of the weapon were deafening. Wayne died with his own gun half out of its holster. Bluttner died when a stray bullet wounded him and pierced his air-line at the same time.

I was sorry about that. I

should have liked to watch him hang . . .

And so fell the last stronghold of the Council in Marsopolis. It is, as a matter of fact, the only item of real interest in Mr. Van Huyten's book—he seems, otherwise, to have contrived to have been elsewhere during every other event of consequence. He was, he admits, drunk at the time of the blasting off of the Water Fleet, thereby missing a superb display of pyrotechnics in the Martian sky when *Golden Hind* blew up. He managed not to be on the spot when the Water Fleet returned. He was drunk again at the time of the evacuation and had to be carried aboard the shuttle.

There is, however, a film in the Library of the Martian Institute. Some of you may have seen it. It was shot during the battle for Port Obolensky. In it we see Meyer, decked out in a uniform that is weighted down with gold braid. On each wide epaulette, in relief, there is a half globe of the Earth—one showing the Western Hemisphere, as it was, the other the Eastern Hemisphere.

(One of the interesting psychological sidelights of the Colonization is that the Marsmen never got around to building a decent telescope . . .)

Roy Farson is with him, and he is no longer wearing his Farmer's green. He is wearing a black uniform, with the single broad band of a Space Commodore on each sleeve and epau-

lettres similar to those worn by Meyer. It is interesting to note that he has not yet assumed, over his left breast, the winged rocket of the qualified Spaceman.

Sandra Marin is there. Like her husband she is wearing Spaceman's black, but it is relieved only by the touch of color on the epaulettes.

They are standing, the three of them, in the transparently walled, pressurized cab of a big tractor just outside the main airlock of Marsopolis. To the left of them is the white, gleaming plastic of the Dome. Behind them and to the right of them is the desert, wave after wave of ochre sand, broken only by a line of drab green marking the course of one of the subterranean trickles from the Pole that were, before Man had ever come to Mars, erroneously called Canals. Above them is the sky, black rather than blue, looking even darker by reason of the few, tiny white clouds reflecting brilliantly the rays of the morning sun.

They are standing stiffly, at the salute. In Meyer's bearing there is only pride and confidence. On Farson's face there is the shadow of doubt. On Sandra Marin's face there is a rapt look of dedication.

There is music on the sound track of the film—rhythmic and gusty, with drums and bugles predominating. There is, too, the cheering of men and women—and the growling and snarling of great machines.

The camera shifts.

We see, then, the long column of tractors, each with its makeshift armor, each with its cannon or rocket launchers. We see the gay, bright pennons fluttering from each tall radio aerial. We see, too, the big, clumsy shapes in the sky, the hydrogen-filled airships, the huge, flabby gasbags with the tiny gondolas hanging beneath them.

This, apparently, is not a film of a victory parade. It was actually taken on the day that the New Earth Party forces set out for the assault on Port Obolensky. Meyer—as is suggested by his appearance—must have been confident. He must have been determined that Posterity would have the opportunity to see what manner of man their savior was. It is a pity, perhaps, that neither Meyer nor any of those close to him ever made the spoken commentary that should be part of the film.

There is, of course, a short speech by Meyer. It contains all the usual platitudes employed on such occasions and winds up practically offering honorary membership of the New Earth Party to the Almighty. To us it seems absurdly bombastic—but, judging by the cheering, it must have been appreciated.

The battle scenes are the best.

There are aerial shots of Port Obolensky—a collection of shining domes in the desert and, standing to one side of them, the tall, silver towers that are the shuttle rockets. In a wide perim-

eter around the spaceport there are trenches and gun emplacements.

Meyer's air force is bombing the domes. Some of the bombs hit, but not all of them explode. Most of the bombs miss, throwing up great clouds of red dust. There seems to be sufficient wind to make both the handling of the clumsy dirigibles and bomb aiming difficult.

Meanwhile, the defenders are not without means of retaliation. First one of the airships is hit by a rocket, then another. There is no explosion. On Mars the hydrogen-filled balloons are almost as safe as are our helium-filled ships on Earth. One of the ships does burn, but it is no more than a pale, creeping glimmer of blue flame. The rescuing vessel is able to come alongside without danger. We see the airmen jumping from one gondola to the other, we see the bombs being dropped from the undamaged ship in a hasty, and successful, attempt to lighten her. There is no attempt to save the crew of the second ship. The rocket has hit her gondola, shattering it and spilling the broken bodies of her crew to the sand below.

The airships retire, save for the one in which the camera is mounted. It stays well clear of the domes, however, and well clear of the gun emplacements along the perimeter. Its camera shifts away from Port Obolensky to the horizon, and there we see the climbing column of dust that marks the approach of Meyer's

land forces. The camera shifts again, and we see a column of armed and armored tractors pouring out from the bigger of the domes.

The airship follows them at a discreet distance.

It is hard to make sense of what follows. All that shows on the screen is a boiling cauldron of red dust through which, at intervals, one sees gleaming metal bodies, the flash of explosions. Farson's account, contained in a letter he sent to his wife after the battle—apparently she did not accompany Meyer and her husband, they having decided that one of the three Party leaders should be kept out of harm's way—gives a better picture.

The airships were disappointing, he writes. They proved their value in reconnaissance, but in little else. They were too slow and too vulnerable. We lost two, the second one with all hands. I am hoping that you will be able to break the news to poor Wrigley's wife. Apart from the personal loss—he was a good friend to both of us—he had the makings of a first-class spaceman and I was hoping to take him with us as my second in command . . .

Well, we learned about the strategy and tactics of tank warfare the hard way. So much that was useless was brought from Earth that one is sorry that somebody didn't find space for a few, good authoritative histories of the Second World War, especially those dealing with the bat-

ties in the Western Desert. As it was, we had to make up the rules as we went along—but so did the Council.

Carl and I talked things over in the cabin of our "flagship" on the journey from Marsopolis. Carl, at first, favored making the approach in a long, single column, arguing that this would reduce the targets available to the enemy. I pointed out that this would mean that the column leader—ourselves—would be exposed to concentrated fire before being put out of action (or destroyed) and this would mean that our beautiful, long column would be just an animal with no head. I did not, I told him, disagree with the principle that military leaders should be exposed to as much risk as their men—but I was damned if I thought that they should be exposed to considerably more.

Rather to my surprise he did not fly off the handle. He was rather ashamed of himself, I think, for having forgotten to consider such elementary matters in his determination to strike while the iron was hot. Quite humbly he asked me for my opinion on the matter.

"Make the approach in line abreast," I told him. "That way we can bring every gun and rocket launcher to bear. That way we embarrass the enemy with a profusion of targets . . ."

"What if he comes out in line abreast, too?" asked Carl.

"In that case we're no worse off than we would have been if

we'd stayed in line ahead," I told him.

We started getting our reports from the airships then. We heard what a fiasco the bombing was—although I admit that the wind didn't help matters. We heard about the destruction of *Firefly* and *Dragonfly* and the death of poor Wrigley and his crew. We heard that the Council tractors were on their way out to meet us.

Carl showed his genius for improvisation then. He decided to keep our fleet in line ahead formation for as long as possible. He wanted the enemy to see us that way. (They, by the way, were maintaining a single column.) Then, using directional light beam communication, he flashed astern a message for four of the lighter and faster tractors to break formation and proceed to the head of the column. On hearing the executive word "Dog," given by radio, the four fast tractors were to weave back and forth across the column head over a wide front, kicking up as much dust as possible. On hearing the executive word "Cat" the remainder of the fleet was to open out to line abreast formation. Luckily the mechanics of this maneuver had already been discussed with all tractor commanders and a drill had been held.

We sighted the enemy as they topped the crest of a distant dune, and if we could see them we knew that they could see us. Carl barked the word "Dog" into

his microphone. The four dust screen tractors went merrily to work, and in a very short time we were ploughing through a fine, rusty-red fog. Carl picked up the mike again and said, "Cat!" We reduced speed then, of course, to allow the fleet to take up its new formation.

The operation was rather a shambles. Three of our tractors were put out of action by collision, and the language coming over the radio was shocking. Carl was furious and ordered strict radio silence. Luckily, the Council General didn't guess what was happening from what he overheard. He should have known—but soldiering is, after all, one of the almost lost arts. (Like astronautics.)

"Negative Dog," Carl was saying. "Negative Dog."

Three of the dust screen tractors acknowledged, the fourth one didn't. We found out afterwards that the enemy had opened fire and scored a lucky hit. We had, of course, neither heard nor seen anything.

The fog was thinning now and we picked up the leading Council tractor almost dead ahead. Our gunners opened fire—so did the gunners of our next abeam to port and starboard. The enemy was firing, too—but at a target far to our right. (The dust was hanging in banks and visibility was freakish.) Our first few rounds missed, then one of us scored a direct hit. The enemy seemed to jump a foot or more into the air, then just sat there

and *shuddered*. That's the only word that I can use. I hate to think of what was happening inside that cabin as the engine tore itself to pieces. The airlock door opened and one man scrambled out. His clothes were on fire, and went on burning even when he was outside. They must have been soaked in fuel. I was glad that the poor devil wasn't wearing a respirator . . .

They came blundering on, still in their line ahead, and we shot them up as they passed. Oh, we had our casualties, too, but nothing so heavy. And their High Command was gone—presumably the leading tractor was their "flagship"—and whoever was left in charge had even less idea than we had. What finally happened was almost funny. You have seen those ancient films that the Institute shows on high days and holidays—those ones called "Westerns." You remember the big scene in most of them. There are the white men in a tight little huddle behind their covered wagons and dead horses, firing at the Indians, who're riding round them in ever narrowing circles, blazing away with rifles and shooting off arrows and, as moving targets, suffering surprisingly few casualties from the fire of the whites.

That's the way it finished up.

More by luck than judgment we got the enemy bogged down in a hollow, and we ran round and round the ridges, letting fly with everything we had. We ran

short of rockets, but the steam cannon behaved well until we started to run short of water. Carl sent the airships back to Marsopolis for fresh supplies of ammunition, and he'd just given the order when we heard a strange voice coming over the radio.

"Hold your fire," it was sobbing. "Hold your fire. Hold your fire. We surrender!"

Well, that was the first hurdle surmounted. We should have liked to have pressed on to Port Obolensky—there was a lot to be said in favor of a night attack, and it was almost sunset—but the main problem was the ammunition shortage. So we had to stay put, hoping that the airships would be able to find us and that the Council had no tractors in reserve. (According to our prisoners they hadn't—but we couldn't be sure if they were speaking the truth.)

It was a pretty miserable night for all of us, especially the wounded. Tractors are all right as a means of conveyance from Point A to Point B, but they aren't designed for living in—especially after sunset. I don't think that I'd ever been so cold in all my life. It wasn't until almost dawn that the airships returned. (What were you people playing at in Marsopolis?) We lit the flares and watched their big, silvery shapes circling overhead, stumbling in the sand as we fumbled for their lines.

The sun was well up by the

time that we were reorganized. Carl, I think, was really enjoying himself, rushing hither and yon and barking orders. He, as you know by this time, hit on the idea of packing the wounded and the prisoners in those tractors—both ours and theirs—not sufficiently damaged as to be unserviceable but too badly damaged to be of further use as fighting units and sending them back to Marsopolis under airship escort. It would all have been elementary to any general in the old days on Earth I suppose—but, as I've said, military matters are a lost art to us.

The airships were used again—to soften up the perimeter defenses. At least, that was the intention—but judging by the volume of fire that greeted us as we approached Port Obolensky the results of the bombing must have been negligible. Our own fire was pretty ineffective, too. In the old days, I believe, they had special guns called mortars and howitzers for the reduction of land fortifications. We could have done with a few of them.

We left half a dozen of our tractors burning on the sand when we turned tail and scuttled over the brow of a high dune. Carl was very unhappy about it all, but was far from giving up hope. He decided to concentrate our fire on a half-mile-long section of the defenses, using the airships for artillery spotting. (I believe that that is the correct expression.) This had the defenders rather baffled. In effect, they were blind, while we were

not. Now and again their own fire would start to come uncomfortably close—when this happened all that we had to do was shift a few hundred yards to the right or left, back or forward.

At noon we tried again.

This time the light tractors were sent out ahead to raise, as they had done before, a dust screen. After a suitable interval we followed, in column, two abreast. We rolled down the slope almost out of control, seeing hardly anything in the red haze. I remember that we were almost on top of a gun emplacement when we crashed over the trenches, and that the gun was still firing—although, luckily, not at us. Then, ahead of us, we saw the white domes.

There was artillery mounted on top of them. We saw the flashes and the smoke. I made some remark about the wildness of the aim of the Council gunners to Carl. He grunted in reply, then started to give an order over the radio. "All weapons open fire on the nearest dome! All weapons . . ." Then—"Stop! Hold your fire! Hold your fire!"

I saw then what he had seen. I saw the flag moving jerkily up the tall staff—the black flag with the blue, green and gold globe of Earth. I saw, too, that the guns on the domes were firing not at us, but at the perimeter fortifications.

And that was that. We had Port Obolensky, handed to us on a silver platter by its own personnel. Not by the Council, not

by the Police—but by those who, even though they had never left the surface of the planet, had more claim to be called spacemen than I have. Carl still thinks, I know, that they changed sides only to save their own skins, that they turned on the Council when they saw that our capture of the spaceport was inevitable.

I don't believe this.

I prefer to believe what old Dimbleby, head of the maintenance staff, told Carl when he greeted us.

"Mister," he said, pointing to the tall, shining shapes of the shuttle rockets, "Mister, we've been looking after those blasted things all our lives. It's good to meet somebody who wants to fly them!"

And that, my dear, is all that I have time for. Young Timkins will be making the flight back to Marsopolis in a few minutes, and he'll be picking up this letter to deliver to you. It's a pity that you can't come out here—these rockets are fascinating things, although not as fascinating as the big ships will be—but somebody has to look after things in the city.

Au revoir, my darling . . .

Things moved swiftly after that. Meyer was Dictator—but his was a dictatorship that almost all the people accepted willingly. The Council had given them security—but had failed, over the long years, to give them hope. Meyer robbed them of security—there is little doubt that

the conversion of the power stations from the use of nuclear energy to that of chemical energy was a reckless undertaking. The engineers knew all about atomic power and weren't at all happy with the gas turbines that had replaced it. It can be said that the gas turbines were equally unhappy under their unsure masters. It would seem that power failures were of very frequent occurrence, so much so that the dome dwellers developed the habit of keeping their respirators ready at hand at all times.

Meyer was Dictator, and Farson was king of the rockets. Port Obolensky had been in the Party's hands for only twenty-four hours when he, accompanied by Dimbleby, took one of the shuttle rockets up for a test flight. Meyer, it seems, was furious—there were so many things to be done, including the trial and execution of the surviving Council members—and Farson was, after all, second in command of the Party. Mary O'Hara, in her gossipy book *Sea Change*, paints an interesting little picture of the events.

I was in the General's office, she writes, taking down notes. He was in an unusually pleasant mood. "They'll have to go, Mary," he told me. "All of them." (He was referring to the Council.) "I can't afford to keep them around. Too often in history revolution has been followed by counter revolution. That

isn't going to happen here if I can help it . . . Now, my dear, take down these names and details. Bryson, William. Charge—treason. Sentence—death." (Bryson had been Council President.) "Kroyitch, Paul. Charge—treason. Sentence—death. Lazenby, Peter. Charge . . ." He paused and laughed. I laughed with him. It was always advisable. "I bet you put down 'treason' as the charge. Well—it isn't. It's 'murder'. But the sentence is the same." (Lazenby was the old Chief of Police.)

We got that piece of business tidied up between us, then the General said, "I'm not happy about the engineers. I don't trust 'em. I still think that they changed over just to be sure of being on the winning side. We'd better get the Commodore along to see what he has to say about it—he's had time to sound them out by now."

So he rang for his orderly and told him to give Commodore Farson his compliments and ask him to step into G.H.Q. for a few moments. The orderly was away a long time and the General was beginning to get impatient. At last he came back.

"The Commodore sends *his* compliments, sir, and says that he's busy."

The General began to swell up, although the air pressure inside the dome was, of course, normal. Just then there was a sort of screaming roar outside, and we all rushed to the window. We saw one of the rockets lifted

slowly, balancing on its long tail of smoke and fire. It looked as though it were going to topple over at any moment. But it did not. It kept on going straight up until it was no more than a streak of white smoke against the almost black sky.

The telephone bell rang then, and I had to leave the window to answer it. There was a lot of nattering with the girls in the Exchange, they seemed to be very excited about something, and then I heard the Commadore's voice. "Is that you, Mary?" he asked. "I want to talk to the General." I said, "I think you'd better come see him, sir." He said, "I can't very well. I'm all of five hundred miles up . . ."

So much for Miss O'Hara. Like everybody else who lived on Mars in the last days of the Colony and who, after the Return, felt the urge to break into print, she was eye-witness to remarkably little of interest.

Meyer was Dictator, and Farson was the rocket king, and Sandra Marin was the propagandist. She went through the Library with a fine-tooth comb. She found books that had been neglected for generations and had thousands of copies printed and distributed free. All of them harped on one theme—the sea. There were novels by Conrad and McFee and Monsarrat that, luckily, had been brought from Earth at the time of the Evacuation (and that, even more luckily, were carried back at the time of

the Return). There was Melville's *Moby Dick*. There was Rachel Carson's *The Sea Around Us*, and that was the best propaganda book of all. All those reading it felt, as Sandra felt, that the sea was essential to the continuance of the race.

And the work went on. Farson and his bright young men learned how to pilot rockets—and, furthermore, learned without losing a single one of the precious shuttles, although one or two were badly damaged. The engineers stripped the power stations of their nuclear reactors—the reactors that had been stripped from the big ships and that were now being returned to them.

Farson and Dimbleby, with a work crew of a dozen, spent a week in Space, making the rounds of the six huge vessels hanging high in their closed orbit around Mars. Their names are familiar enough to all of us—*Star of Hope*, *Golden Hind*, *Waltzing Matilda*, *Mayflower*, *Alouette* and *Lili Martene*. All of them, with the exception of *Golden Hind*, are now in orbit around Earth. Maintenance crews visit them regularly—experience has taught us that they are, to Earth's population, what lifeboats are to the crew of an ocean-going vessel.

But Farson and his engineers were the first men in Space in generations. It is fascinating to speculate on their feelings (no records survive) as they clambered over and through the spi-

dery network of girders, as they entered the control rooms in which, once, the harshly competent Captains had sat, each of them absolute monarch of his own little world.

And how did they feel as they looked down—although there is no “down” in Space—to the vast, ruddy globe swimming in the emptiness? How did they feel as they looked out to the too-bright sun, the too-bright, unwinking stars? Were they frightened—as new recruits to the Maintenance Service are always frightened, as veteran spacemen are often frightened? They must have been. Man isn’t made for Space, any more than he is made for strange planets. Man can endure Space—just as he, who has a long line of marine ancestors, can endure the land. Man can endure Space—but he doesn’t have to like it.

After the initial survey Farson returned to Mars. There was so much to be done. There were the mathematicians to be bullied into the production of epemerae for the newly trained navigators, there were the bio-chemists to cajole into a speedier production of the necessary yeasts and algae. Then there was the transportation of the reactors from the power stations to Port Obolensky, and the loading of them into the shuttle rockets.

The installation of the reactors in the ships was successfully accomplished. The provisioning of the big vessels went without a

hitch, and the manning of them. There is a fragment of film that shows the scene at the Spaceport as the shuttles blast off.

The black and gold uniformed spacemen and spacewomen are there, drawn up with military precision on the concrete apron. Standing a little to one side, somehow aloof, are the silver-clad Dowzers. In the foreground is Meyer—he is shaking hands with Farson and Sandra Marin.

The first crew marches smartly to the first of the waiting rockets, up the ramp into the slip. The ramp slowly lifts, becomes part of the shell plating. There are the first faint flickers of flame—then a roaring torrent of fire. The rocket lifts, accelerating rapidly. In seconds it is no more than a white vapor trail, twisted and contorted by the high level winds, in the blue-black sky.

The second rocket takes off, and the third. And the fourth . . .

At last there is only one rocket left. Meyer steps back, salutes Farson with a grandiloquent gesture. Farson returns the salute, stiffly and formally. With Sandra by his side he walks to the last rocket, follows his people into the ship. And then they are gone.

There is another fragment of film. It shows the night sky over Marsopolis. The familiar constellations are there, and the two tiny moons. Suddenly, casting a harsh brilliance over the desolate landscape, there is a streak of blue fire across the sky. It is followed by another, and another . . . Then, shockingly, a new star is

there in Orion, outshining Sirius. A new star? A new sun, rather. Slowly, very slowly, it fades.

That was the end of the *Golden Hind*.

The voyage to and from the Asteroid Belt is very well documented. Ships' records exist in profusion, also the journals kept by various members of the expedition. Farson writes the following description:

So we've made it. So we're up and out. There are only five of us now instead of the original six but we should manage all right, as long as there are no further losses. I see no reason why there should be—except for our inexperience—but we have yet to come to some conclusion about the fate of *Golden Hind*.

Inexperience it must have been in her case. Something went wrong with the reactor—that much is obvious. But *what* went wrong? It is a great pity that there were no survivors. Anyhow, all the engineers and watch officers are on their toes now and determined that there shall be no repetition of the tragedy.

Space is big. Reading about it, and watching the old films, I had no idea how big. It didn't seem so vast when we were doing the overhauling and the refitting—after all, the bulk of Mars filled almost half the sky. But now that the planet is only a ruddy disk dwindling astern, growing smaller with every passing second, I'm beginning to feel just a

little frightened. I mustn't let it show.

So wrote Farson, the Space Commodore. He was frightened, but was determined not to show it. He was not the only frightened one in the squadron. The expedition must take its place as one of the proudest exploits of Man—five ships, long unused, their real capabilities unknown to their crews, seventy-five badly scared men and women. Yet there was no talk, at any time, of turning back, no display in public of the private feelings that were shared by all.

Sandra Marin writes:

This is frightening.

I keep telling myself that it shouldn't be. It should be, I know, like coming home. After all, Space was the cradle of Life—the seeds of Life endlessly drifting between the stars, borne on the tides of light and gravity, falling on fertile worlds, into the oceans of fertile worlds. That's it. I keep trying to work out for my own comfort a similarity between Space and the sea. I keep trying—but it's not much good. After all, we're only a few minutes away from the sea, relatively speaking. Even relatively speaking we're millions of years away from Space.

Roy is frightened. I know it, although outwardly he is very much the Space Commodore. He's a stubborn brute—he won't admit his fear to me. Come to that—I won't admit mine to him. He insisted yesterday—we still keep to the fiction of days and nights

—that I accompany him on a tour of inspection of the outer hull. This lack of gravity is bad enough inside the ship—but inside we have bulkheads around us to give us the illusion of safety even though we do have always that horrid sensation of falling. Outside there aren't any bulkheads. Outside there are only flimsy handgrips and lifelines that look as though they would snap under the weight of a cat. Not that there's any weight, which is just as well. Or is it?

Anyhow, we went outside. My spacesuit was warm enough, according to the little thermometer among the other instruments on my wrist, but I felt cold. It seems incredible that one should feel so cold and still live. I was cold, and there was the continual dread of falling into nothingness, and then, when I had the sense to look away from the stars to look at the ship, there was the surprise that we should be such fools to trust ourselves to such a flimsy contraption.

Oh, she's big enough, but she's just a web of light girders surrounding the globes that are the pressurized compartments. The two shuttle rockets, each clamped in its nest, looked far more solid, far more *capable*. They look like ships. The ships themselves look like nothing so much as the balls of tumbleweed that drift before the wind across the Martian deserts.

Roy pointed out the others to me. Astern of us was *Waltzing Matilda*, close enough so that I

could just see a hint of structure. Astern of her were *Alouette* *Lili Marlene* and *Mayflower*, no more to me than just three more stars in the sky.

We went inside then. I wasn't sorry. From now on I look after my yeasts and algae and leave this playing at spaceman to Roy and the other men . . .

In spite of what Sandra Marin has written, it wasn't always the men that made the best astronauts. For example, in mid-voyage the Captain of *Waltzing Matilda* stepped down quite amicably in favor of his Bio-Chemist, who was a woman. The Chief Engineers of *Alouette* and *Mayflower* were women, as was the Navigator of *Lili Marlene*. All carried out their duties in an exemplary manner.

When, after weeks of plunging through emptiness, the fleet neared the Asteroid Belt the Dowzers came into their own. They were happy to have employment at last. Until the Belt was reached they had prowled miserably through the ships, holding before them their little pieces of twisted wire, pretending pleasure when they "found" by this means water tanks or pipes that they had known about after their very first practice tours.

Now, in each control room, the Dowzers kept their watch. They ignored the chatter of watch officers and navigators about looking for planetoids with high albedoes, relied entirely on the strange sense they had that bore

no relation to sight. They did not look through the ports at the planetary debris sweeping past—the pebbles and the boulders and the mountains. They ignored the cries of wonderment that greeted each sighting of some indubitable artifact—a great rock, perhaps, bearing upon it a ruined house, or a battered thing that seemed to be a wide-winged aircraft. Now and again they would insist that some brightly gleaming planetoid was not ice, and after one or two fruitless investigations of tiny worlds of white-gleaming mineral salt their advice was heeded.

It was Farson's Dowser who found, at last, what they were looking for.

"Commodore," he said, "steer for the Drift."

Farson, as he notes in his journal, was perturbed. What the Dowser referred to as the Drift was a mass of debris that, gleaming in the sunlight, looked almost solid. Farson was well aware of the essential flimsiness of his ship, of all the ships. To take the clumsy, almost unmaneuverable vessels into that maelstrom would be almost certain suicide.

Even so, inexperienced as he was in spacemanship, it did not take him long to make a decision. He ordered the shuttle rockets of *Star of Hope* to be prepared for use, sent instructions to the other Captains to do likewise. He took the first shuttle into the Drift himself. Sandra was with him. This is what she writes about it in her journal:

I had sworn never to venture outside the ship again, but this was different. The Belt hasn't the horrible emptiness of Deep Space. It has a dreamlike quality—dreamlike, but not nightmarish. It has beauty—but it is not the cold, hard beauty of the void between the worlds. It is like, almost, one of our Polar snowstorms—the swirl of wind-driven flakes gleaming in the sunlight. It was hard for me to realize that some of these "flakes" were bigger than the ship, were bigger than Phobos or Deimos.

We sat in the control cabin of the shuttle—Roy, little Willis, our Navigator, old Bartok, our Dowser, and myself. We felt weight again as we pushed off from the ship, as the chemical fuel of our rockets started to burn. Roy was busy, with little time for conversation. He steered us between huge boulders, around the flanks of what must once have been mountains. Once, unavoidably, he drove clean through a shoal of small debris—luckily there was nothing larger than a pebble, and luckily the velocity differential was small. Even so, the noise inside the cabin was deafening—and terrifying.

Old Bartok started to get excited. The twisted silver wire that he held in his two hands seemed to have a life of its own. Roy had to speak to him sharply, telling him that the shuttle rocket could only go round large masses of debris, not *through*

them. Yet even I could see that he was keeping us most of the time on the heading that our Dowser was indicating.

Then we saw it, looming up ahead—white and green and blue and beautiful. There was no mistaking it. Only ice could have that translucence, that shifting play of cool color. It was a sphere, a great sphere. There was a whole sea there, and it was ours for the taking—if we could take it. Beyond it were other, similar globes.

Willis used the radio to inform the other ships of our discovery while Roy came in for a landing. This wasn't easy, as the ice world had its own tiny satellites—some of them little spheres of frozen water, others of them rocks and similar debris. But he managed it and we hit the surface with only a slight shock. We put on our suit helmets and prepared to leave the shuttle. Roy insisted that I go first, saying that the idea of finding seas for Mars had been originally mine. I couldn't help thinking—and I'm afraid that it's very disloyal of me—that if Carl had been along he would have assumed that the privilege of first-footing it was his inalienable right.

I looked around me as I walked slowly down the ramp. On all sides, from horizon to horizon, the ice was perfectly smooth, save for the surprisingly neat crater melted by our exhaust as we set down. Overhead was the black sky, with the bright, tiny

sun and the scintillating motes that were the Drift. Five of those motes, I knew, must be the ships.

I waited at the foot of the ramp until Roy joined me there. I grasped his arm firmly, told him that together we would take the first step on to the surface of this new world. He allowed himself to be persuaded. What happened then was funny. We had forgotten the fact that ice is slippery. Our feet made the first contact—the second contact, a split second later, was made by our backsides . . .

That, then, was the first landing in the Belt since the explorations of Commodore Tranter. Tranter's ship had returned—he had commanded *Waltzing Matilda*—although Tranter himself had long been part of the dust of Mars. There had been no women in Tranter's crew so, even though she had shared the honor of first-footing with her husband, Sandra Marin was still, so far as her own sex was concerned, the first ever.

Visionary she may have been, visionary she was, but the records show that she was alive to the possible dangers that might lurk in the world of ice. She insisted on taking test borings, and these samples were carried back to the ship by the shuttle rocket. They were thawed, and sundry micro-organisms were discovered that had survived the aeons-long deep freeze. Lacking guinea pigs—it is a great pity that that humble useful animal

did not survive the Final War—Sandra experimented first of all with the yeasts and algae in her vats and tanks, then with herself. She was able to announce that, at least insofar as the first test borings indicated, the ice harbored nothing that would be inimical to Man or to his domestic plants.

Farson's problem was getting the ice worlds out of the Drift as a necessary preliminary to their long Sunward—and Marsward—fall. Towing was out of the question—even by the shuttle rockets—until such time as the frozen seas were out of the thick of the Belt. He called a Captain's Conference aboard the flagship and, during a meeting lasting several hours, the matter was thrashed out. It was Captain Meg Bowen, of *Waltzing Matilda*, who made the proposal that was adopted.

Her scheme was simple enough. This was to bore—or melt—suitably shaped holes in the surfaces of the ice asteroids and to pack them with the chemical fuel used by the shuttles. The tiny, frozen worlds were, in effect, to be converted into huge spaceships with rather limited endurance. Explosion of the charges at carefully calculated times would slow their orbital speed, causing them to fall out of the Belt. The effects of collision upon them—and they were bound to collide with all manner of debris whilst driving clear of the Drift—would be negligible.

It was, then, the turn of the Navigators to take over. Their calculations supported Captain Bowen's proposal. If all went as planned the huge masses of ice would fall free of the Belt at a time most advantageous for a powered orbit—they would be taken under tow by the ships—back to Mars.

Volunteers were called to man the primitive control rooms that would be set up in the ice worlds. One of them was Willis, Farson's Navigator. Like the majority of the personnel of the expedition he seems to have had literary ambitions and kept a journal. He complains:

It's a pity that I haven't, so far as I know, Eskimo blood. This is what living in an igloo must have been like. I could do with a whale blubber lamp . . . (I wonder if there are any whales, or anything like them, down in the ice . . . There's a fish of some sort staring at me through the wall . . . Ugly-looking brute . . . very ugly . . .)

Well, here I am, and I may as well make the best of it. I still think that the Old Man was wrong in insisting that these so-called control rooms be fitted with hot and cold—mainly cold—running atmosphere and every modern convenience. A man can live for a week in a spacesuit if he has to. It gets a bit smelly, of course—but at least his nose, not being frozen like mine is at the moment, is still capable of smelling. The main problem, of course, is air supply. With the present

set-up the air-reconditioning unit takes care of that . . .

Later he writes:

Have just fired the first rocket, right on time. I'm sorry that I couldn't have been on the surface to see it go off—it must have been rather spectacular. Not that results in here weren't spectacular. It reminded me of something out of one of those sea stories that Sandra peddled as propaganda when she was selling the sea back on Mars. It was like being in a submarine with depth charges going off all around. Very disconcerting.

A large piece of ice has broken out of one of the walls—and in it is the fish that I mentioned in my first entry. I'll turn up the heater a bit and leave him by it to thaw while I go outside to do some navigating.

The next entry is interesting:

The damned thing was alive! I came back after I'd taken my sights and there it was, flopping around on the floor. I went too close to it and it took a snap at me. Luckily I was still wearing my spacesuit—that thing has *teeth*. I've been in touch with the flagship and they tell me that Sandra is on her way here by shuttle.

The fish is finally disposed of:

Sandra and Kennedy, who piloted her in, have just left again. Sandra was in a very gay mood—although I am sure that her behavior was far from scientific. She had a knife with her, and she gutted the fish, which was dead by the time she got

here. She made a little fire with rocket fuel and used the aluminum lid of one of my equipment boxes as a skillet. She cooked the fish. Kennedy pointed out that it might be poisonous, but she said that she *knew* it wasn't and, anyhow, she was the Bio-Chemist. Kennedy said that it might be a valuable specimen and she replied that we should have the bones left, if nothing else. The bones were all that were left. Getting seas on Mars will be a great thing—but getting seas already stocked with such delicious food is something that we never dreamed about . . .

By the time that we had finished our meal it was time to fire the second rocket. I gave Kennedy instructions and went outside with Sandra. As I thought it would be, it was most spectacular. The actual blast was out of sight, being over the very close horizon, but the glare of it was refracted through the ice. It was like standing on a huge, beautiful opal. It lasted for seconds only. It should have lasted for hours.

When we got back inside we found Kennedy searching the fragments of dislodged ice for more fish. Unluckily for us, there weren't any.

So that—although Mr. Willis refrains from stressing the point, was the first fish fry in centuries. There are those who accuse the chroniclers of the expedition of having been overly concerned with trivialities, but I

cannot agree with them. Who, in the final analysis, is to say what is trivial and what is not? Admittedly the fish incident does seem to have been trivial—but it should not have been. It should have warned Farson, and it should have warned Sandra Marin, especially Sandra Marin.

It did not.

Be that as it may, the carefully timed rocket blasts were having their effect. Outside the Drift hung the big ships, each with its attendant pair of shuttle rockets. Outside the Drift Farson waited, and his Captains with him, listening to the radio reports from the dirigible planetoids, trying to plot their tracks on the 3D chart. Now and again Farson would leave Captain Meg Bowen in temporary command of the squadron and take a shuttle into the Drift to make a personal inspection of progress. He notes in his diary that the entire operation went with astonishing smoothness and that the worst part of it all was the waiting.

They broke out of the Drift at last—the five great, white shining spheres, like bubbles floating up from a raging torrent. Their surfaces were no longer smooth but were scarred by the rocket blasts, were pitted by the innumerable collisions that they had sustained. But they were out and clear and, left to themselves, would fall into cometary orbits around the sun.

There was much blasting back and forth of the shuttles, and the planting of the especially design-

ed anchors deep into the ice, and the passing of towlines. Gently, very gently, the big ships started to move from their orbits. Slowly, very slowly, the strain came on the hawsers. Nothing parted. The anchors held.

Gradually, carefully, the big ships pulled away from the Belt, shaping their orbits for Mars. Congratulatory messages flashed between them. Farson ordered the splicing of the main brace—although it is doubtful if he knew the origin of the expression. His radio operator succeeded in getting a message through to the home planet reporting the success, so far, of the mission. In his reply Meyer displays what was, for him, a rare sense of humor. "I will declare a public holiday on your return," he sent. "A seaside holiday."

"The holiday," replied Farson, "will be worth waiting for."

It was, of course, a long wait. Even under continuous drive the distance between planetary orbits cannot be bridged in days. It was a long wait, but for those in the ships the time did not drag. Navigation became a full-time job, inequalities in the lengths of the towing wires causing all manner of unexpected and irregular deviations from orbit. The Engineers, too, were kept on their toes. As for the Bio-Chemists, they had collected enough samples of life before the tow commenced to keep them happy for at least a year longer than the estimated duration of the trip.

Farson occupied himself with astronomical observations — the flagship boasted a big refractor far superior to anything that had ever been built in Mars. He became especially interested when Earth swam into view from behind the Sun. Sandra Marin writes that one day she came into the ship's observatory to find her husband looking very puzzled. He moved away from the telescope, told her to look through the eyepiece. The instrument was trained on Earth.

"Now," he told her, "look at my epaulettes."

She thought at first, she says, that he had gone mad. She realized then that he wanted her to look at the little, half globes of Earth that were the insignia of the New Earth Party. She saw what had puzzled him.

"Of course," she writes, "none of us had ever bothered to check the designs. We had assumed that Levinsky could be trusted to work from the globe in the Institute. I suppose that when we tackle him about the difference between his pretty little hemispheres and what Earth really is like, he'll plead artistic license . . ."

Then Mars bulked bigger and ever bigger in the sky, and Earth was forgotten. Messages between the flagship and the planet flickered back and forth. The Syrtis Major area had been evacuated in readiness. All low-lying ground had been evacuated. The spaceport had been prepared for the reception of the shuttle rockets.

All that could possibly be done, had been done.

It is not hard for us to imagine the wild excitement on Mars when the lights in the night sky first became visible. There were the five faint stars that were the ships, the five brighter ones that were the planetoids. Night after night they grew brighter until, at the finish, they were brighter than the insignificant moons of Mars. Then the sky was alive with the flare of rockets as the fleet threw itself into its closed orbit around the planet—the light all the more dazzling from being reflected from the great masses of ice. It was a brilliant sign of hope.

There is no film record of the fall of the frozen seas. We know how the feat was accomplished—the towlines were transferred from the ships to the shuttle rockets, and the shuttles pulled gently against the direction of revolution. This much is obvious—Farson and his crews were the veriest greenhorns when they set out from Mars; they were seasoned astronauts when they returned from the Belt. They could—and did—juggle with tremendous forces and stupendous weights with confidence. They even, incredible though this may seem, used the grazing ellipse technique so that each planetoid, when at last it fell with remotely controlled braking jets blazing, had already been slowed down considerably by repeated contacts with the thin atmosphere.

Each of them, too, fell well within the target area.

"We were not so concerned," writes Sandra Marin, "with the possibility of damage to the planet as with the probability of damage to any highly developed life forms within the ice. Having discovered that the frozen seas held a variety of edible fishes and molluscs and crustacea—not dead but in a state of suspended animation—we were determined to do all that we could to preserve this excellent source of tasty and nutritious food. By the time that we had returned to Mars I had, even, made plans for an oxygenation plant for the water, although I was not sure that this would be necessary. Our researchers had indicated that the fifth planet must have been as deficient in free oxygen as is Mars itself . . ."

(Perhaps that first fish fry in the control room hacked out of the ice did influence the course of history!)

When the last planetoid had fallen the shuttle rockets landed. Meyer was at Port Obolensky to greet Farson and Marin. There was, it seems, to have been a reception on a grand scale, with speeches and music, but the returned water hunters wished, before all else, to look at their new sea. After a very short delay the three Party leaders boarded an airship and were flown to Syrtis Major. For most of the journey they were buffeted by strong gusty winds and visibility was

reduced by streamers and banks of fog. There was a raw dampness to the air and a tang of salt that penetrated their respirators. It was a smell that is familiar to all of us but that was rich and strange to the Marsmen.

When the airship reached Syrtis Major, Meyer—he was an impatient man—was disappointed. He had expected to find a sea, a real sea, already in existence. What he found was a great new mountain range, an enormous pile of icy rubble, sharp, crystalline peaks lifted high against the unnaturally cloudy sky. At the edges of the vast area, however, the sand was dark and a few gleaming pools of water had already formed.

Meyer was even more disappointed when he was told that the night cold would, at first, undo most of the work of the daytime sun. "But," Sandra told him, "it won't always be like this. Once the sea has thawed it will have its effect upon the climate."

Slowly—too slowly for the impatient Meyer—the thaw continued. Day by day the icy peaks melted down, day by day the water spread further over the plain. Fish appeared, and weeds, and both, to Sandra's delight, seemed capable of adapting themselves to Martian conditions. And there were clouds in the sky—real clouds, heavy banks of cumulus that looked like those depicted in paintings and photographs of the skies of Earth. There were night frosts

and morning fogs. There were, even, showers of rain.

And then—Syrtis Major was a sea at last. A few dazzlingly white bergs still floated on its surface—but it was a sea. Its beaches were places of pilgrimage to which all who could spare the time came, by tractor or airship, to look and wonder.

It was such a crowd of sight-seers that witnessed what was, for most of them, the last and most wonderful (and most dreadful) sight of all. It is not hard for us to reconstruct from the stories of the few survivors what happened. It is easy for us to visualize the scene—it could be, save for a few differences, a crowded beach on Earth.

The younger people are, except for their respirators, in a state of sun-tanned nudity, and some few of them have even ventured into the still icy waters, where they are playing and splashing. The older folk are wearing either brightly colored costumes or the equally colorful coveralls of their Guilds. There are, of course, no stalls, no vendors of cold drinks and foods. There are no pleasure craft, great or small, on the blue water—but the white bergs along the horizons could well be white sails. And the sand is sand, and there is the usual debris of half-dried weed and the broken shells of molluscs between high and low water marks, and there is the usual smell of marine decay that is never like the smell of decay at all but clean and sharp in the nostrils.

It is easy to imagine the excitement that swept the beach when the big, dark shape appeared, rising and falling above the low waves a mile or so offshore. None of those there had any doubt as to what it was. This was the first time that they had ever had a sea of their own, but they had read about the seas of Earth in every available book on the subject. It was, they all knew, a whale.

There was an airship drifting lazily overhead. Its pilot, ironically enough, was Charles Willis—that same Charles Willis who was Farson's Navigator in *Star of Hope* and who, in his ice cavern in the first of the ice planetoids, had speculated on the possibility of the existence of whales in the frozen mass beneath his feet. This much is known: He was in radio touch with Port Obolensky and mystified the duty operator by bawling into his microphone, "There she blows!"

He valved hydrogen and dipped, circling the spot where the thing had first appeared. Its second appearance was closer inshore. Willis followed it. Suddenly, from what looked to the watchers ashore like a dorsal fin, there was an intense flicker of light that leapt up to embrace the airship. For long seconds—or so it seemed—the aircraft was outlined in pale fire. Then there was only a handful of glowing ashes falling towards the surface of the suddenly hostile sea.

Incredibly, the people remain-

ed where they were, watching. They must have refused to believe what they had seen. They were still there, most of them, when the thing waddled ashore, heaving itself out of the water and up the beach on caterpillar tracks. That was when the panic started—but it was too late. The same fire that had destroyed the airship licked out and devoured most of the watchers on the beach.

Two tractors got away. They had the legs of the thing from the sea, but no defense against its armament. One of them made skilful use of the cover afforded by dunes and got back to Marsopolis. The other one relied on speed and ran in a straight line. It did not run very far.

And Meyer, when his reconnaissance aircraft had confirmed the truth of the wild story told by the occupants of the lucky tractor, prepared to fight the second—and last—war of his career.

The following recorded conversation is of interest. Why and how this tape came to be saved is a mystery—but people running from a burning house save the most fantastic and incongruous objects.

Meyer (shouting furiously): You brought the horrifying thing here, Farson! How shall we deal with it?

Farson (coldly): You could try shouting at it the same as you've been shouting at me.

Marin (even more coldly):

There is no need for either of you to be so childish. Suppose we try to make up our minds as to just what we're up against. Once we have done that we can work out a way of dealing with it.

Meyer: You hope

Marin: I hope. First of all—the thing is obviously a machine. Probably there are intelligent beings inside it.

Meyer: Why “probably”? “Certainly,” I'd have thought.

Farson: In the Final War on Earth there were robot weapons.

Marin: That's my point. This thing may be a robot weapon. It's obvious now what happened to the old fifth planet—they had a final war, the same as we did, and made an even better job of destroying their world.

Meyer: Well, what do we do about it?

Farson: Working on the assumption that there are intelligent beings inside the . . . the submarine, we could try to parley.

Meyer: We have tried. We're running short of white flags and volunteers.

A Voice: General! Three more of the things have crawled out of the sea!

Meyer (irritably): All right, all right. (To Marin) You're the scientist, Sandra. How do we convince these beings that we're friendly? After all, they should realize that they're in debt to us.

Marin: I'm a biologist, Carl, not a psychologist. Besides—as I said, those things may be no

more than semi-intelligent fighting machines.

Farson: And even if they have got human crews . . . Or organic crews . . . Even then they may be no more than semi-intelligent machines.

Meyer: What do you mean?

Farson: This, Carl. Those things, or people, have been dead to all intents and purposes for a long time. In those millions of years their brains may have deteriorated, or their minds. (I'm even less of a psychologist than Sandra is!) When their world was blown up, when they lost consciousness, they were all keyed up to kill or be killed. It could be that this resolve is all that remains of their intelligence. Not a pleasant consideration, but a very possible one.

Marin: And here's another point, Carl. This odd combination craft of theirs, this hybrid between a tank and a submarine. Maybe it's not a hybrid at all . . .

Meyer: What do you mean?

Marin: Maybe there were two separate and distinct races on the fifth planet. We know that there were land dwellers—we saw the ruins of their houses, the wreckage of their aircraft. There may have been sea dwellers, too. Those things may be, as it were, submarines in reverse, machines in which beings of the deep sea can come ashore to fight their enemies on land. In which case they will regard all land dwellers as their enemies.

Meyer: What is this weapon of theirs?

Farson: You're the military expert, Carl.

Marin: It's an atomic weapon of some sort.

Meyer: I know that.

A Voice: Only two of the airships have returned, General! The others have been destroyed.

Meyer: Did they do any damage to the enemy?

A Voice: No.

Meyer: Stay here, you two. I'm going to question the pilots.

Marin: I can't help feeling that this is our fault, Roy.

Farson: Nonsense, Sandra. We're all in this—every man and woman on Mars. We wanted a sea, and we got it, even though we did get rather more than we bargained for. And suppose this is the end . . . All we've done is hastened it by a few years.

Marin: But it was my idea in the first place.

Farson: Without Carl's political and military skill and my astronautics we'd have got no place.

Marin: I suppose not.

Farson: The trouble is that we've got no place to go now. I suppose we could reach the Jovian satellites—but we could never colonize them. And Venus is an even more impossible desert for our kind of life than Mars ever was.

Marin: What about Earth?

Farson: It's a long way to go just to die of radiation poisoning at the end of it.

Marin: I'm not so sure. I saw Levinsky, you know, when we got back from the Belt.

Farson: Levinsky? What the hell has he to do with this mess?

Meyer: They laugh at bombs. The only thing that seems to stop them is when the bearings of their tracks get clogged with sand—and that was all the good the bombing did. They have some means of clearing the tracks from the inside. A jet of compressed air, perhaps . . . Well, have you decided anything?

Marin: Yes. Six ships brought the original colonists here. They were packed like sardines and doped with lethegin. We have only five ships now, but our numbers are less. We still have supplies of lethegin . . .

Meyer: You mean . . . ?

Marin: Evacuate.

Farson: But . . .

Meyer: Try to be realistic.

Marin: I am. I told you, Roy, I saw Levinsky . . .

Farson: *Damn* Levinsky!

A Voice: General! The First Tractor Squadron is ready!

Meyer: Good. (To Farson and Marin, with a strong note of appeal in his voice) I'm relying on you, Sandra, and you, Roy, to find some way of dealing with these things.

Marin: I've already told you. Evacuate.

Meyer: We can't. Even if there was some place to go to, we can't give up *everything*.

The record breaks off there. Farson and Sandra Marin must have carried on their conversation in another room. Meanwhile, the First Armed Tractor Squad-

ron was flung into the path of the invaders. Meyer himself was in command. He seems to have fought the action with skill, taking full advantage of the cover of dunes, scattering land mines in the path of the things from the sea. Surviving accounts of the action are confused, but agree on one point. Twice the things from the sea were halted—on each occasion one of the alien machines was upset by an explosion and the advance was delayed while its mates butted and prodded it into an upright position. Throughout the running fight, however, their armor was impervious to Meyer's fire—and Meyer's armor was no protection against whatever weapon the aliens were using. Whenever a target presented itself the pale, flickering fire would lash out, and the unfortunate tractor and its crew would be no more than a scattered handful of briefly glowing dust on the red dust of the desert.

Meyer, with two-thirds of the squadron destroyed, ran for Marsopolis. He called out all available crews and tractors to sow the approaches of the city thick with mines. When the work of defense was well under way he stormed in to see Farson and Marin. He demanded that Farson take the shuttles up at once to the ships to strip them of their reactors. He was convinced that only atomic weapons would be of use against the enemy. He had, even, some crazy, impractical scheme for the mounting of

entire drive units on tractors to be used as mobile ray projectors. There is, of course, just a chance that it may have worked. There is the certainty that if it had been attempted the Return would never have taken place.

But—"Evacuate!" said Sandra Marin.

"Evacuate!" said Roy Farson. "Call in the tractors, the airships. Load them with people and supplies, and get them to Port Obolensky without delay. The shuttles are ready. Dimbleby has already sent a working party out to the ships."

"By whose orders?" stormed Meyer.

"By *my* orders, Carl. Believe me, I hate this as much as you do. We were all of us born here, and this is our world. We've worked to make it a place where we can live. But . . . Look at it this way. After all these centuries we're going home."

"Home? Are you crazy? This is home."

"It was never a real home," said Sandra softly.

They were interrupted by the arrival of messages from the reconnaissance airships. It seemed at first that the minefields had played their part. A vast area of desert was obscured by smoke and dust, and of the invaders there was no sign. Faintly, those in Meyer's office could hear the cheering as the citizens of Marsopolis celebrated. There was a gradual cessation of the cheering as the contents of the second message were circulated.

It read: "Enemy apparently undamaged, and using weapon to detonate minefields in their path."

"We haven't much time," Farson insisted. "If you delay any longer there will be no time."

"I," said Meyer, "have no intention of running."

"Then I will give the orders," said Farson. "After all, I am second in command, and in supreme command so far as astronomical matters are concerned."

Meyer pulled his pistol then, and there is little doubt that he would have used it. He forgot that Sandra was standing behind him. She picked up a heavy paperweight from the desk—it was, as a matter of fact, a curiously marked stone that she had brought back from one of the ice planetoids—and hit him, hard at the back of the head. He fell heavily to the floor.

Farson had picked up the telephone and was barking orders. "Commodore Farson here. Recall all tractors. Recall all airships excepting *Mayfly* and *Midge*, who are to maintain observation of invaders. Put plans for evacuation of city into effect immediately."

"What about Carl?" asked Sandra.

"Tie him up. Gag him. Keep him out of sight. We shall be the last to leave. We'll take him with us then."

Luckily the advance of the aliens was not fast. They halted for a long time at one of the

"canals." As far as those in the airships could see they were sucking up water from the subterranean stream through long pipes. *Mayfly*, assuming that the attention of the crews of the machines would be fully occupied, went in to bomb. *Mayfly*, with her people, ceased to exist.

And through the airlock door poured the tractors—a growling, snarling stampede of machines. Fully loaded they were with men and women, the pitifully small number of children. There were the animals, too—the twelve pigs from which our present herds are descended, the six ancestral rabbits whose numerous progeny provide us with an alternative meat supply, the twenty odd cats whose offspring have no function but to look ornamental. There were the bundles of household possessions, most of which had to be left at Port Obolensky. There were books. There was a haphazard selection of official records.

Marin and Farson rode in the last tractor. Meyer—ungagged now, unbound—was with them. The story is that he ordered the tractor crew to overpower the Commodore and his wife—but all six of them were spacemen and women who had been on the expedition to the Belt. Meyer blustered. He pleaded. He lapsed at last into a sullen silence.

When they arrived at Port Obolensky the first of the shuttles had already blasted off—and, according to the radio reports from *Midge*, the aliens

were in the city. It is probable that they assumed, from past experience of the wars on their own planet, that there were pockets of resistance to be dealt with and they wasted time prowling through the streets and investigating the houses. One can imagine them emerging from their landships encased in bulky suits holding water instead of air—but this is pure supposition. We know nothing at all about them. Marin's theory that they were dwellers in the deep seas of their own world seems to fit the facts of the case—but we do not know.

We do know that, at least in the initial stages, the evacuation went remarkably smoothly. The air was filled with the roar of the shuttles, and their wakes were pillars of cloud by day and pillars of fire by night. We know that Farson cursed the unavoidable display; a providential gale had wiped the desert clean of all traces of the exodus from the city, but the vapor trails and the fiery columns and the man-made thunders were a beacon to the invaders. In a matter of minutes they would be closing in.

He was not surprised when *Gnat*, who had relieved *Midge*, reported that the enemy machines had left Marsopolis and, without hesitation, had set their course for the spaceport.

The accent now was on people rather than things. Household effects and clothing would have to be abandoned. Records would have to be left. Every rocket

must be packed to capacity with people, people, people.

It was at this time that Meyer was given his freedom. The evacuation was too far under way for him to attempt to stop it. The stories tell of a little man, shrunken inside his flamboyant uniform, who wandered about the spaceport like a lost child, ignored by the busy crowds who were loading and dispatching the rockets.

And then, at the finish, the run of good luck came to an end. Only two more rocket loads would complete the evacuation—and the last two rockets had both developed engine defects in their descent through the atmosphere. They had both landed without crashing—but the credit for this goes to the pilots rather than to the machines. The defects were not serious—a choked feedline, a malfunctioning fuel pump. Dimbleby asked for an hour for the repairs. *Midge* reported that at their present rate of advance the aliens would be at *Port Obolensky* in forty-five minutes. There was no time to call relief rockets down from the big ships' orbit.

Meyer stood listening while Farson, Sandra Marin and Dimbleby discussed the situation. Let Sandra Marin tell what happened in her own words:

Poor old Dimbleby was almost in tears, she writes. "I can't let them go the way they are," he said. "They'd never make it. I must have the time, Sandra. I *must*."

"You shall have it," Carl said, surprising all of us. "I promise you that." There was a return of the old bombast in his use of the word "I." He turned to me. "But, first of all, I want to know why you and Roy have decided to return to Earth."

I had the photographs with me. I showed them to him.

"These," I said, "are photographs of the big terrestrial globe in the Institute. And *these* are photographs of Earth as she really is. We took them from *Star of Hope's* observatory on the voyage back from the Belt." I pointed at the hemispheres on his epaulettes. "Those are wrong. Those are Earth as she was. There has been a redistribution of land and water, and the chances are that the new lands are free from radio-activity."

"I see," he said. It should have been ludicrous when he tore the epaulettes from his uniform, but it wasn't. "To hell with Earth, anyhow. I'm a Martian." He started to bawl out in that huge voice of his. "I want twenty men! I want twenty good Martians! I want twenty good Martians who're willing to fight for their world!"

He got his twenty. He could have got four times that number. He could have got Roy and myself, but he accused us of trying to desert from our own Service and ordered us to the rockets during the onslaught.

The last account that we have of Meyer comes from one Will-

iam Riley, who was Engineer of *Midge*. He writes:

We hung there over the spaceport, our engines just turning over fast enough to hold us against the wind. Vanishing to leeward we could see the other airships; they had been abandoned when their crews were ordered into the shuttles. Over the northern horizon we could make out the cloud of red haze that warned of the aliens' advance. Below us Dimbleby and his crew were working frantically on the two remaining rockets. We knew what was happening, and were already discussing what to do in the event of the repairs not being completed on time. Ferranti, our Captain, said that we should take *Midge* down and carry off as many of the people as we could. The rest of us were in favor of attacking the aliens, although we knew that our bombs would be useless.

The loudspeaker of our radio crackled and then somebody—I think it was the Commodore—said, "*Midge*! Get clear of the blast-off zone!"

I increased revolutions and Ferranti took us a little way to the nor'ard. The blue-black, gleaming hulls of the invaders were over the horizon now. They were moving faster than any of us had ever seen them move. We lost sight of them when one of the minefields ahead of them went up—and then their blunt, ugly snouts pushed out from the dust and smoke as they kept on coming.

I turned to look as I heard the roar from the spaceport. One of the two grounded rockets was up—it was, we learned later, the one with the choked feedline. It lifted uncertainly and we were afraid that it was going to crash. But it lifted, and gathered speed, and in seconds vanished into the sky. Dimbleby's men were still working on the second one.

I looked to the north again—the invaders were getting close—then turned hurriedly as there was another roar from the port. For a horrible moment I thought that they'd repaired the second rocket and blasted off without us, abandoning us. But the rocket was still there. The noise came from the tractors—twenty of them. In ragged formation they were streaming out across the desert, towards the north. Our loudspeaker was yapping again. There was no mistaking the General's voice. He wanted to know the position of the enemy.

Ferranti answered, giving him the information.

He said, to us, "He's mad." We all of us thought the same. We all of us knew that the General's guns and rockets would be about as effective against the things' armor as snowflakes, and that their ray would turn him to dust before he got off more than a couple of rounds.

We thought that he was mad—but we were wrong. To begin with, he had the squadron creeping along at the lowest possible speed so that they proceeded

with the minimum dust. He led them to that hollow in which the Council's forces had been trapped—and I remembered *that* well enough, I was an engineer in one of the Police tractors! He halted them just below the crest of the ridge to the south of the basin. Through our glasses we could see two men getting out and crawling over the sand to the top of the slope where they lay motionless. They must have been the lookouts.

I could hear Ferranti talking over the radio, reporting the enemy's progress. I could see them myself, lurching over the dunes and slithering into the hollows, getting all the time closer to the ambush. Once the General's voice came over the speaker, "Lieutenant, look after yourself now. Get back to the spaceport."

"Not as long as I can be of use to you," replied Ferranti.

The things crawled up the last slope, started to slide down into the hollow in a great cloud of dust. The two lookouts got to their feet, ran to their own tractors. The twenty of them started up and surged over the crest of the dune, charged down on the aliens. Five of them were destroyed before contact was made. We could hear the crash as the other fifteen of them hit. Three of the things were overturned, and another six tractors dissolved in flame. Then we couldn't see any more for the dust. We hung there, watching and hoping. Perhaps the things could be destroyed after all.

NO MORE SEA

Then we saw them, crawling one by one out of the red haze that filled the basin, and we knew that the General was dead. We felt a little happier when we heard the message from the spaceport telling us to come in, that repairs were completed. We felt a little happier—but we agreed with Ferranti when he said, "We should have been down there . . ."

And that was the last day on Mars.

When the fleet blasted away from its orbit there were strange lights shining and moving around Syrtis Major, and more lights around Marsopolis and Port Obolensky. Those same lights have been observed over the years by the astronomers on Earth; we have not let the science of astronomy lapse as did the Martian colonists!

The Return was made without incident, other than the loss of one shuttle during the landing on Earth. As we have read in the histories, the process of re-adaptation was slow and painful, but it was made. Luckily machinery capable of being reconditioned was found on certain not too heavily contaminated islands that were all that remained of the old land masses, and luckily the new, mutated plants proved suitable food both for our ancestors and for their livestock. Then there is the sea, and all the good things in the sea.

Even now, we do not know what truth there was in Sandra

Marin's theory. One thing we do know—after the return to Earth there was a wave of fertility that has yet to diminish.

Marin, no doubt, would have carried out her researches to a conclusion. Unfortunately she and her husband were drowned while bathing from one of the beaches of New Atlantis.

There is so much that they could have told us—both of them. We know so little of the rise of the New Earth Party, so little of the events leading up to the expedition to the Asteroid Belt, so little of the final, disastrous war against the things from the frozen seas, so little about the things themselves.

Such knowledge would be invaluable now that we are considering the recolonization of Mars; in another generation the mounting pressure of population will

be a serious problem. Our physicists tell us that they have discovered the nature of the aliens' weapon and have devised a defense against it. Or it may be that the aliens themselves, by this time, are faced with similar problems and have turned covetous eyes upon our water-rich world.

It may be that the Revelationists are right in their contention that all evil things come from the oceans, and that the New Earth Party tampered with the destiny of the race by the bringing of seas to Mars. It may be that only by migration to almost waterless Venus will Man be saved. The verse upon which they base their doctrine is apt enough: *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea.* **THE END**

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